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REMARKS BY

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*Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities*  
MINISTER OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

*Statements & Speeches*

TO THE ROTARY CLUB OF

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I'm glad to have this opportunity of talking to you about the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. Although the activities of the universities and colleges, and our industrial training programs affect all of us in so many ways, I find that a lot of people are not very sure of what the Ministry does. I hope you'll have a better idea after I've spoken to you, for--I promise--not more than twelve minutes. And, if you like, I'll try to answer your questions.

I don't want to be criticized for putting the Ministry's work into the straightjacket of a financial statement. But perhaps the quickest way I can suggest the impact of the Ministry is to tell you that our annual budget exceeds a billion dollars--your tax dollars. Having said that, I want you to know that more than 98 percent of that amount is transferred to our universities and colleges and students. And of the remaining two percent, about half goes to run industrial training programs. I want to emphasize this point because so many people seem to think that Queen's Park consumes the money. The fact, of course, is that the money is transferred to agencies for their special work.

But even though our Ministry expenditures are a small proportion of our budget, we are doing our best to cut back. While the federal government goes through the exercise of a modest increase of personnel of 1 1/2 percent, we are cutting by more than twice that amount. Next year requires more economies. I hope that the institutions we fund will be able to reflect in their own ways the economies which we ourselves are practising.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities began as a small advisory group which assisted government in distributing what now seem to be tiny grants to a few universities. Then, in 1964, The Department of University Affairs was established because post-secondary education became a growing social service--and a growing government expenditure. In 1971 the Department took up the responsibility for the development of the province's Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology--which this year celebrate their 10th anniversary. And three years ago we were given the responsibility of running the province's industrial training programs.

Along with this go the several programs of student awards, of which the main one--costing about \$50 million this year--is the Ontario Student Assistance Program.

Let me try to tell you very briefly the part the Ministry plays in these activities. I like to describe them as "post-compulsory" education, because nobody is obliged by law to take part in them.

Looking at things from the Ministry end, I have to start with the Industrial Training Branch. I happen to believe that industrial training programs--involving apprenticeship, adult retraining, and many other programs--are a vitally important



activity. Once trained for a trade, earning a living, contributing to the wellbeing of the province and the country, a person may find for herself or himself, many sources of intellectual pleasure-- in our libraries, museums, galleries; in the country; visiting points of interest. Well-trained people who can practise a trade are not only important to the health and the economy of the province: they may--if they want to--enjoy many of the voluntary ways of satisfying their minds and their spirits.

In my Ministry, our Industrial Training Branch is responsible for administering apprenticeship programs; trades' training; retraining programs (for people that are changing their occupations); upgrading programs, and language training programs. We also have a special cooperative program, involving employer, employee and government, called "Training in Business and Industry" to help people upgrade their vocational and academic skills. In 1975, about 66,000 people took part in this program alone.

You may be surprised at some of the numbers. For example, 175,000 certificates of qualification are maintained in our Industrial Training Branch; and we currently have about 26,000 active apprentices, going through their qualification process. Our apprenticeship counsellors are located in 31 places across the province. And in 1975 we supervised and marked about 23,000 apprenticeship examinations.

And you may not know that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities regulates the operation of the Registered Private Vocational Schools in the province. They operate under an act, which we have to maintain. And I'd like to mention here my appreciation of the work of these private enterprise institutions, and my gratitude that they, and the Ministry, are able to work so well together.

The Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology cooperate very well with us in our industrial training programs. Parts of the apprenticeship programs, the retraining programs, the upgrading programs, rely upon the colleges for their teaching. This activity is part of the colleges' commitment to vocational training.

I think we can be very proud of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology. As you may recall, they were set up to provide an alternative to the universities. And many people thought that they would become junior colleges, providing a sort of feeder to the universities. I'm happy to say that has not been the case. Our colleges are distinctive, providing vocationally-oriented programs, and meeting the particular needs of their communities. This, I might say, isn't always easy. Just think of one of our colleges - Confederation College - serving a "community" spread over a part of Ontario about as large as France.

Each college has its governing board. And I am advised about the policies and operations of the colleges by the Council of Regents. The Council, by the way, has the particular responsibility of representing the college Boards of Governors in collective



bargaining with the academic and support staff units of the colleges. In this, and in other activities, the staff of the Ministry provides the necessary support.

Because the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology were established by the government for particular--and mainly vocational--purposes, the Ministry is responsible for reviewing very carefully their activities, the way these activities are distributed among the 22 colleges and their many campuses, and the costs involved. The Council of Regents and my staff work closely--and, I'm happy to say, harmoniously--in this important work.

The oldest component of the Ministry is its responsibility to the universities. I might say it's also the most expensive component. This year, the government grant to the province's universities approaches 600 million dollars, supporting the studies of 150,000 full-time students, tens of thousands of part-time students, and the scholarly activities of more than 10,000 professors.

Although we are sometimes criticized for trespassing upon the autonomy, the independence, of the universities, we try very hard to avoid this. The problem is, simply, that while it is necessary that the universities maintain an independence from government they must, nevertheless, be accountable for their expenditures because more than 80 percent of their operating revenue comes from the taxpayer. If you ever hear somebody complaining that government is undermining the independence of the universities, please ask them to be specific, and then let me know what their particular complaint is. Frankly, I believe that our universities have retained a remarkable independence, which is to their credit and to the government's.

A very small group of people in the Ministry--less than 20 in all--assesses the universities' financial needs, helps draft legislation, and tries to keep on top of university matters to the extent that I can respond to questions from Members of the Legislature and from taxpayers. This division of the Ministry must also help me to evaluate the recommendations made by that important advisory committee, the Ontario Council on University Affairs, which is appointed to make recommendations to me upon many matters of university policy.

As we try to reduce the size of our Ministry, we are faced with an increasing number of applications for student assistance. This year the number was more than 100,000. The principal program of student assistance gives loans and grants to students, depending upon their needs. I wish it were a simpler system. But as we have tried to make it more equitable, so it seems to have grown more complex. And, in this day and age, it gives rise to some difficult questions ..... should the student's need be related to his or her parents' means? ..... to what extent



should the student be expected to repay? ..... how can we be fair to students from lower income groups and yet avoid rip-offs that cost the taxpayer money? .....

I'm sure you've read in the newspapers--editorial comment, articles, letters to the editor--about whether our high school students are properly prepared for university. Is there a misfit between the academic competence of the graduate from Grade XIII and the expectations of a first-year university course? This sort of question leads, in turn, to a more fundamental one, which has to do with the purpose of the universities--whether they are to serve an increasing spectrum of expectations or to maintain what is so often called an academic elitism.

I don't know the answer to this sort of question. And I don't feel very embarrassed about it, because the question has been asked, and has remained unanswered, for a long while. However, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, we have just embarked upon a massive study about this interface between school and university. And we hope it will give us an insight into the kinds of competence which the universities expect, the kind of academic abilities which the high school student has acquired, and the relationship between the two.

This topic is part of the continuing debate about "excellence" and "accessibility" for many years, the government has promised--and has fulfilled its promise--of accessibility to post-secondary studies for every qualified student. The debate hinges upon what is meant by "qualified". And, in practical terms, it has to do with what sorts of facilities and resources we ought to provide for all sorts of people that wish to continue their education after they have completed the legal school requirements.

And this leads me into the questions which all of us have to ask. I'm working my way through them. And my staff are giving me the pro's and con's of the alternatives. Here are some of the questions which we have to answer as we try to frame future policies for post-compulsory education:

- .... are degrees and diplomas called for unnecessarily by employers?
- .... is there an easy equilibrium between the vocationally oriented programs of a university and its purely academic pursuits?
- .... what is the role of government in trying to establish such an equilibrium?
- .... what is the responsibility of the taxpayer--either in providing an education for the intellectually inclined, or for the person who will enjoy a professional's salary?

- .... while the recent review of government programs suggests that government should not subsidize "pleasure" courses at our colleges, might we not argue that the middle-aged taxpayer has as much right to a subsidized course in pottery as a seventeen-year-old has to a course in electronics?
- .... are all of our programs too long? Have we, perhaps been led a little too far by the people who naturally and reasonably wish to extend the amount that they "teach"?
- .... should more responsibility be placed upon the individual for acquiring his own education--formally or informally?
- .... should industry be expected to sponsor to a greater extent those programs which develop professional or technical competence among the people it hires?
- .... is too much support being funnelled into universities and colleges via grants, rather than via fees?
- .... how can we guarantee that necessary independence and autonomy of the universities while the universities are increasingly merging with the market-place, and the taxpayer provides most of their financial support?

These are a few of the more general questions that face me as Minister. I won't bother you with the multitude of specific, daily, problems. But I wouldn't like you to think that I can spend all of the 24-hour day working at them. As Minister, I sit in Cabinet--that is, on the Government's Executive Council: and that cuts a hole into one or two days a week.

I don't want to go into the structure of the government process, except to say that we have a Cabinet sub-committee, linking ministries that have related purposes. My Ministry allies with Health, Community and Social Services, Education, Culture and Recreation. And we all meet most weeks, to try to put our collective minds to work upon policies that interact through our ministries.

And, of course, I try to be prepared for the daily question period. Then there is attendance at all the other activities of the House.

And those people who elected me--or for that matter voted against me--properly expect me to listen to their cases, respond to their questions, act on their behalf, and consider their various points of view. Really, that's what it's all about.

I believe that these other responsibilities are important--and that's why I've mentioned them. However, today I've tried to give you an outline of what the Ministry of Colleges and Universities is about. I hope I've said enough to spring a few questions.



